DISCOURSE MARKERS AND INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE MARCADORES DEL DISCURSO Y COMPETENCIA INTERACCIONAL

Article · January 2016

READS
6

4 authors, including:

Carmen Gregori-Signes
University of Valencia
26 PUBLICATIONS **49** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Normas. Revista de Estudios Lingüísticos Hispánicos, Anejo 9 de Normas: << Propuestas didáctica innovadoras sobre enseñanza de lenguas y gramática>>, pp. 109-120. www.uv.es/normas

DISCOURSE MARKERS AND INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE

MARCADORES DEL DISCURSO Y COMPETENCIA INTERACCIONAL

Carmen GREGORI SIGNES, Michael O'MARA SHIMEK, Laura PLANELLS BOLANT

Universitat de València y Universidad Católica de Valencia

ABSTRACT:

Communicating with people from different countries implies not only choosing the appropriate words but also using appropriate verbal and non-verbal resources in order to enhance communicative effectiveness and thus be perceived as being interactionally competent. This paper focuses on discourse markers. Discourse markers are often classified as belonging to the realm of spoken grammar (cf. McCarthy and Carter 2001), a field which still receives considerable attention in textbooks. First, the concept of grammatical interactional competence (Young 2011, Walsh 2012) is defined; second, we illustrate how discourse markers help maintain and enhance specific interpersonal and textual functions contributing to grammatical coherence in spoken interaction in keeping with relevant English language learning objectives; third, examples are provided to support this claim by analyzing listening comprehension texts taken from current textbooks. The results of the analysis indicate that: a) listening comprehension texts do in fact include discourse markers, though b) not all their functions may be included in the book; and, finally that c) listening comprehension texts can be a good way to provide contextualized examples of the correct use of certain grammatical features of spoken language and, in particular, of discourse markers which contribute to the improvement of interactional competence in students.
KEY WORDS: interactional competence, discourse markers, listening comprehension

RESUMEN:

La comunicación con la gente de países diferentes implica no sólo la elección de las palabras apropiadas, sino también la utilización de recursos apropiados verbales y no verbales para realzar la eficacia comunicativa y así ser percibido como interaccionalmente competente. Este artículo fija su atención en los marcadores del discurso. Los marcadores del discurso a menudo son incluidos en el reino de la gramática hablada (cf. McCarthy y Carter 2001), un campo que todavía recibe la atención considerable en manuales. Primero, es definido el concepto de competencia gramatical interaccional (Young 2011, Walsh 2012); segundo, ilustramos cómo la ayuda de los marcadores de discurso mantiene y realza funciones específicas interpersonales y textuales que contribuyen a la coherencia gramatical en la interacción hablada de acuerdo con la lengua relevante inglesa aprendiendo objetivos; tercero, se proporcionan ejemplos para apoyar este cometido mediante el análisis de textos de comprensión auditiva tomados de manuales actuales. Los resultados del análisis indican que: a) la audición de textos de comprensión realmente incluye marcadores de discurso, aunque b) no todas sus funciones puedan estar incluidas en el libro; y, finalmente, c) escuchar textos de comprensión puede ser un modo bueno de proporcionar ejemplos contextualizados del empleo correcto de ciertos rasgos gramaticales de la lengua hablada y, en particular, de los marcadores de discurso que contribuyen a la mejora de competencia interaccional de los estudiantes.
PALABRAS CLAVE: competencia interaccional; marcadores del discurso, comprensión auditiva.

1. INTRODUCTION

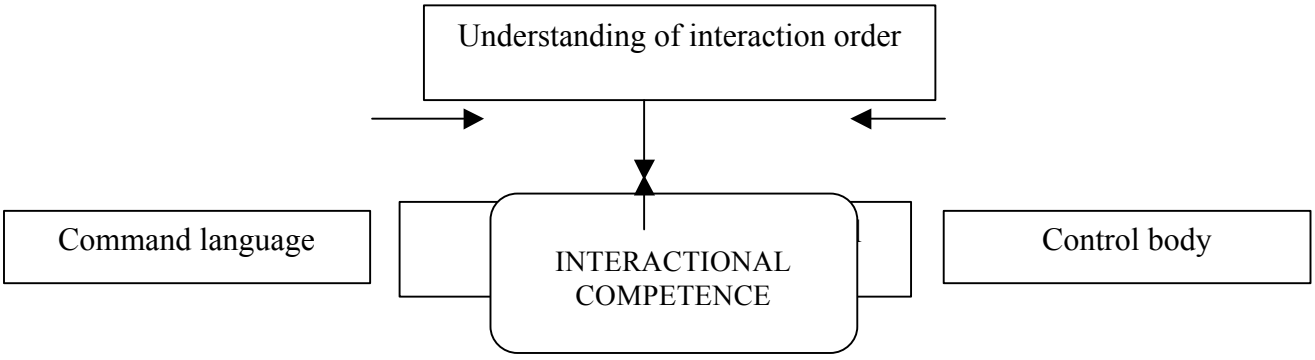
Communicating with people from different countries implies not only choosing the appropriate words but also using appropriate verbal and non-verbal resources in order to enhance communicative effectiveness and thus be perceived as being interactionally competent. This paper focuses on discourse markers and how their use and/or lack of use may affect the interactional competence of the learner.

Discourse markers are often classified as belonging to the realm of spoken grammar (cf. McCarthy and Carter 2001), a field which still receives considerable attention in textbooks. First, the concept of grammatical interactional competence (Young 2011, Walsh 2012) is defined; second, we illustrate how discourse markers help maintain and enhance specific interpersonal and textual functions contributing to grammatical coherence in spoken interaction in keeping with relevant English language learning objectives; third, examples are provided to support this claim by analyzing listening comprehension texts taken from current textbooks. The results of the analysis indicate that: a) listening comprehension texts do in fact include discourse markers, though b) not all their functions may be included in the same book; and, finally that c) listening comprehension texts can be a good way to provide contextualized examples of the correct use of certain grammatical features of spoken language and, in particular, of discourse markers which contribute to the improvement of interactional competence in students.

2. INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE

Lindgren (2008, p.12), basing her claims on previous studies, considers that it is not possible to study all parts of interaction as this requires more time and knowledge than any one person can provide. Lindgren (2008) claims that interaction is much more than something that belongs within one discipline and argues that one can name all relevant factors while pointing out that one's specialty and knowledge are not enough to be able to study everything. Lindgren (2008) identifies four main parts of interactional competence as illustrated in figure 1.

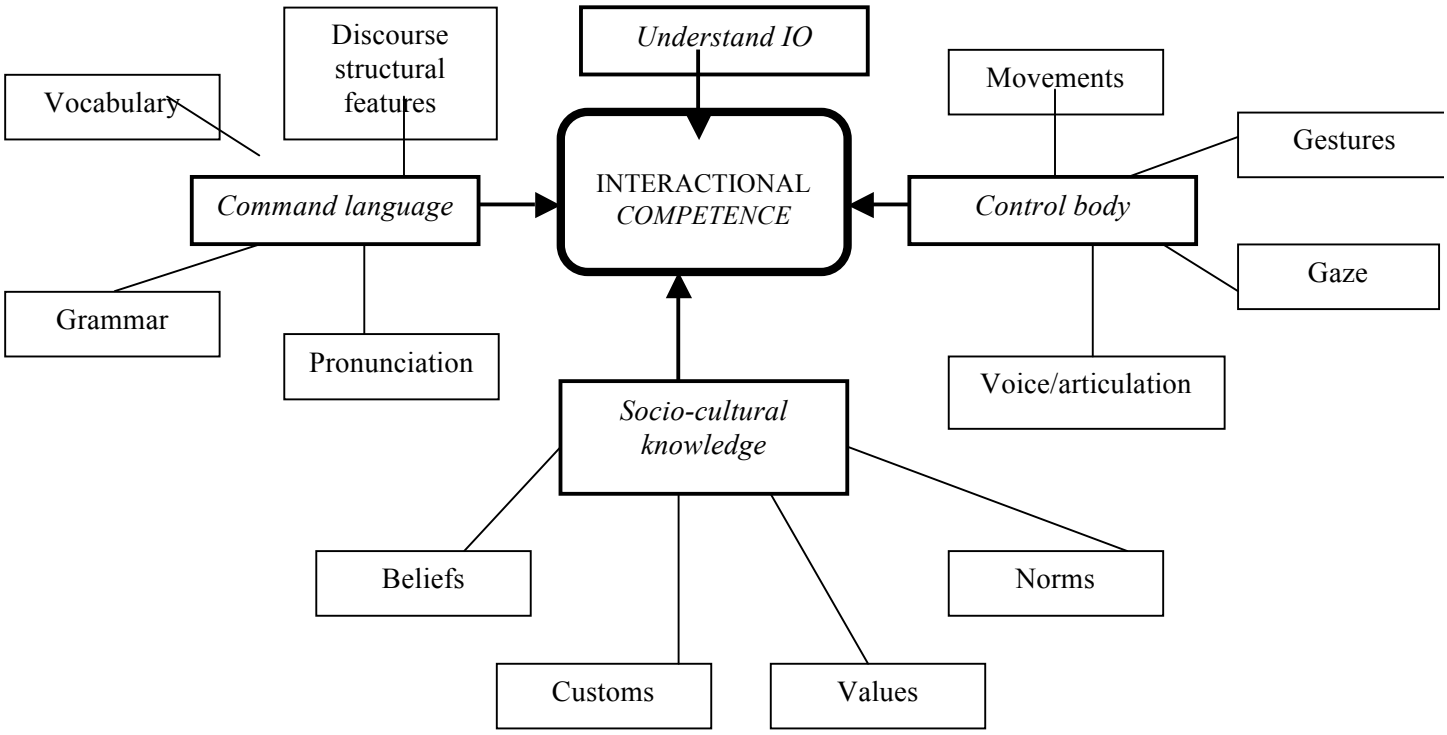
Figure 1. Classification of interactional competence



The four main areas that control interactional competence (hereafter IC) are *understanding of interaction order, body control, language command* and *handling of socio-cultural knowledge.*"Control body" includes everything concerned with body language, movement and how one works in a physical sense. "Command language" includes knowledge of and ability to use all linguistic features. "Handling socio-cultural knowledge" implies having knowledge about culturally and socially accepted behavior and social structure outside of the interaction. Finally, "understand interaction order"is about knowledge of the structure of interaction as a whole, for example, understanding and using the correct turn-taking patterns.

According to Lindgren (2008), these four parts do not make up IC exclusively in themselves but also influence each other. Thus, they should not be seen as entirely free-standing elements which can be studied in isolation since focusing on just one factor when studying interaction does not give a full picture of the interaction situation. In order to understand interaction, one first has to realize that the nature of interaction is inherently multi-dimensional and that there is a need to look at different factors as well as the interdependency between them. Lindgren developed her model of interactional competence into a series of sub-skills (figure 2):

Figure 2. Deeper classification of interactional competence (Lindgren, 2008)



In this taxonomy, language command is divided into four subcategories: vocabulary (semantics), grammar (syntax, morphology), knowledge about and ability to use Young's (2000) six discourse structuring features and pronunciation.

In turn, Walsh (2012) considers various practices available to both teachers and learners to enhance classroom interactional competence (hereafter CIC) which are more dialogic, more engaged and more focused on participation. He uses a conversation analysis informed methodology where data extracts are presented to highlight specific features of CIC. He argues that we, as teachers, are constantly evaluating and assessing our learners'ability to produce accurate, fluent and appropriate linguistic forms; that there is a tendency to emphasize an individual's ability to produce correct utterances, rather than to negotiate meanings or clarify a point of view or idea. Speaking tests focus heavily on accuracy, fluency, grammatical structures, range of vocabulary and so on. They rarely consider how effectively a candidate interacts or how well a candidate co-constructs meanings with another interlocutor (cf. Walsh 2012).

This paper agrees with Walsh's (2012) point of view, since, as English teachers, we want our learners to be capable of communicating in this language: indeed, effective communication rests on an ability to interact with others and to collectively reach understandings. In other words, and quoting Walsh (2012, p.2), interactional competence is what is needed in order to "survive most communicative encounters". Consequently, being accurate or fluent is insufficient and speakers of an L2 must be able to do far more than produce correct strings of utterances. They need to be able to pay attention to the local context, to listen and show that they have understood, to clarify meanings, to repair breakdowns and so on.

Walsh (2012) introduces and reminds the research community of the two main features belonging to interactional competence: a) IC is concerned with what goes on between interactants and how communication is managed between two speakers (cf. McCarthy 2005). As a consequence, according to Walsh, IC is context specific and concerned with *confluence* (McCarthy 2005) or the ways in which interactants construct meanings together, as opposed to individual performance.

One crucial feature of IC is to listen to what the other person says and be able to react to it. "Good listenership" according to McCarthy (2003) refers to a speaker who demonstrates that he has understood what was said and that the conversation is being followed without any problem. In the classroom, listening comprehension has two functions, on the one hand help improve the understanding of whatever is going on in the interaction, and, on the other, it may serve the purpose of introducing features which are common in spoken language: discourse markers are one of those features.

3. DISCOURSE MARKERS AND THE GRAMMAR OF SPOKEN ENGLISH

Discourse markers (DM hereafter), one of the most common features in conversation, are "words or phrases which are normally used to mark boundaries between one topic or bit of business and the next" (Carter and McCarthy, 1997, p. 13). DMs play a fundamental role in spoken interaction. For example, words and phrases such as *right, okay, I see* or *I mean* help speakers negotiate their way through talk indicating whether they want to open or close a topic or continue it, whether they share a common view of the state of affairs or what their reaction to something is. In other

words, they signal transitions in the evolving process of the conversation, index the relation of an utterance to the preceding context and indicate an interactive relationship between speaker, hearer, and message. DM's are also used to change topics, to finish a particular topic, finish the whole conversation or perhaps return to a previous topic (McCarthy and Carter 2000).

There is no universally agreed way of classifying discourse markers.Variance exists in classifying discourse markers as evidenced in Fung and Carter (2007) and Parrot (2000); since, when classifying DMs into categories of meaning and use, most times the categories overlap. Parrot (2000), for example, distinguishes four types of discourse markers: i) textual discourse markers, used to "signpost" logical relationships and sequence, to point out how bits of what is said relate to other bits; ii) conversation management discourse markers used to "manage"conversation, to negotiate who speaks and when, to monitor and express involvement in the topic and in the interaction (e.g., *actually*, *anyway*, *by the way*, *I mean*, *ok*, *now*, *right*, *so well*, *yes*, *you know* or *you see*); iii) preparatory discourse markers, used to influence how our listeners react, such as *I'm afraid* or *(I'm) sorry*, *honestly,* and *frankly*; and iv) attitude markers (e.g., *of course*, *obviously*, *clearly*, *undoubtedly*, *preferably* and *surprisingly*). Fung and Carter (2007), on the other hand, classify discourse markers as "useful interactional maneuvers to structure and organize speech on interpersonal, referential, structural, and cognitive levels" (p. 410) i.e., interpersonally (affective and social functions), referentially (relationships between verbal activities), structurally (indication of discourse and turn taking) and cognitively (speaker and listener knowledge).

4. METHODOLOGY

The Spanish Educational Order 112/2007 signed the 20th of July (2007) by the Minister of Education establishes as part of the obligatory curriculum for Secondary Education for 4th of ESO the development of communicative strategies for interaction in order to improve fluency in interpersonal communication, the use of communicative strategies in oral messages: use of verbal and non-verbal context and previous knowledge to identify the situation, keywords, attitude and intention of speakers; the development of oral production competence using elements of cohesion and coherence; the use of spontaneous and precise responses in oral activities in the classroom; the use of suitable conventions in real and simulated communicative activities: turn-taking, topic change, etc.; autonomous use of communicative strategies to initiate, maintain and end the interaction (Spanish Educational Order 112/2007). In turn, the Common European Framework of References also establishes the curriculum for speakers at the A2 level: "students at the A2 level can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters to do with work and free time. They can also handle very short social exchanges but they are rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his own accord. " (p. 26) In terms of fluency, "students at the A2 level can make themselves understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very

evident"(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 29). Furthermore, in terms of coherence, they should be able to link groups of words with simple connectors such as *and*, *but* and *because*.

Taking into account these premises, the present paper compares the use of discourse markers in listening comprehension exercises included in the coursebook *High Score 4* (textbook used in secondary education for A2 level) with the use of discourse markers by native speakers as reported by McCarthy (1998). The purpose of this comparison is to see to what extent listening comprehension exercises in this particular textbook enhance the use of DMs, one of the essential features in spoken discourse. Comparison is made between the 18 listening comprehension exercises extracted from the abovementioned textbook and those used in the CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English), when this corpus included a total of 5 millionwords (cf. McCarthy 1998).

The analysis first identified the top ten most frequent discourse markers in the listening comprehension exercises from units 1 to 18 (excepting units 2, 9 and 11 given that those listening comprehension exercises were monologues and not conversations between two or more speakers). This list was compared with the one included in McCarthy (1998), as illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1. List of discourse markers in both corpora

Listening comprehension texts	*Cancode*
So	So
Yes	Yeah
Well	Right
Really	Just
Oh	Okay
Yeah	Like
Now	you know
What about	Well
Exactly	Because
Okay	Now
	Yes

5. RESULTS

The most frequent discourse markers found in *High Score 4* are *so*, *yes*, *well*, *really*, *oh* and *yeah* and in corpus 2 *so*, *yeah*, *right*, *just*, *okay* and *like*. Below how the listening comprehension exercises use three of the most frequent discourse markers (*so*, *yes/yeah* and *well*) is described

5.1. So

So is the most frequent discourse marker encountered in both corpora. Parrot (2000) states that *so* is used in spoken English to signal that we are getting back to the main topic after a digression, to claim a pause before beginning a new topic and to indicate that what we are going to say is related to what we or someone else has just said. *High Score 4* includes *so* showing precisely those functions and thus coincides with how speakers really use this marker in conversation.

5.2. Yes/yeah

The discourse marker *yes* is used 21 times and *yeah* is used 5 times all throughout the 18 listening comprehension exercises. According to Chapetón (2009) *yes* is used as a cooperation or agreement marker and as a confirmation marker. Fung and Carter (2007) share the same opinion and argue that *yes* is an interpersonal discourse marker whose function is to show agreement in responses.

On the other hand, *yeah* has, according to both researchers, two different functions. Firstly, Chapetón (2009) classifies *yeah* as a turn taker, a back-channel signal and reaction discourse marker; while Fung and Carter (2007) consider *yeah* a structural marker to show continuation of topics. However, as claimed by Chapetón (2009), *yeah* is also classified at the same level as *yes*, so that *yeah* seems to have another function which is common to *yes*: cooperation, agreement and confirmation. Again, according to Fung and Carter (2007), *yeah* has the same role as *yes* since *yeah* is an interpersonal discourse marker and seems to be a marker to show responses. It seems, therefore, that *yes* has as a primarily function to show responses, while *yeah* has a double function: it is used as a marker to show continuation of topics but it is also used as a response marker, as in the case of *yes*.

Some conversations taken from *High Score 4* reflect that the listening comprehension exercises are actually using *yes* as a discourse marker to show agreement and cooperation. In the case of *yeah*, *High Score 4* includes 5 examples of the use of this marker. As a consequence, it can be concluded that *High Score 4* includes examples of real uses of the marker *yeah.*

Furthermore, according to Fung and Carter (2007), *yeah* is employed primarily as "a solidarity building device to mark agreement which a listener would reasonably be expected to recognize, and also as a reception marker to signal coherence within and between turns" (p. 432). Therefore, in conversations *yeah* functions primarily not only to mark continuation of topics (this is its first role) but also to acknowledge, agree, affirm and cooperate (this is its second role). In other words, *yeah* is also used to show responses at the same level of *yes*. In *High Score 4,* however*,* the whole range of functions of *yeah* is not included in the listening comprehension exercises, mainly the function indicating understanding or acknowledgement (interpersonal category). Furthermore, *High Score 4* prevails in the use of *yes* over *yeah* in its listening comprehension exercises, as indicated by the results. This is not completely negative since the use of *yes* is the required marker for the context and the substitution for *yeah*

would not be possible in some cases. However, a combination of both, as well as an increased use of *yeah* would be more convenient given that Fung and Carter (2007) found its use more frequent in real language. This was also confirmed when compared with CANCODE (McCarthy 1998) where *yeah* (which is commonly associated with a response marking role) was found to be the second most frequent word in contrast to its formal form *yes* which is widely represented in *High Score 4*. *Yes*, according to Fung and Carter (2007), is extremely rare in native speaker conversations, while *yeah* is the most used marker.

Taking this into account, to help avoid future problems such as those encountered by Gregori-Signes and Bou (1999) who, in their study of the use of DMs by non-native speakers, found that in most cases, a) the learner is simply transferring his/her thinking process from Spanish into English; and b) there is a qualitative divergence between the type of spoken features used by the learner and the native speaker which may constitute a pragmatic error. The authors suggest that the possible causes and consequences of this error should be further researched; and that it would be convenient to determine a strategy or a methodology to enhance the proper use of discourse markers (cf. Gregori and Bou 1999). One proposal underlying the present research project is that listening comprehension exercises could facilitate the understanding of the different functions of DMs and help avoid pragmatic error.

5.3. Well

Well is the third most frequent discourse marker used in *High Score 4*. According to Parrot (2000), *well* is a DM that expresses reservation about what we or someone else has said, consideration towards what someone else has said, indication that we are thinking and do not want to be interrupted and indication that we are taking up the topic that is already under discussion. Gregori-Signes (1996) agrees with other authors and claims that *well* does not transmit any semantic or syntactic function. In fact, it could be eliminated from the sentence and the meaning would not be affected. Thus, its function as a pragmatic marker seems to be the only alternative to explain its use in discourse. Gregori-Signes (1996) argues that the principal function of *well* is to establish and maintain the relationship between the interactants in a conversation; its use is fundamental in order to contribute to the good relationship between interactants and to soften the negative discourse. In her analysis, this author states that *well* can have different functions in both English and Spanish. One of them is, following Schiffrin (1987) "a delay device". This refers to the use of *well* as a discourse marker that may help the speaker make a brief pause and think about what he is going to say.

As can be observed in some conversations in *High Score 4*, speakers use *well* in order to breathe and think about what they are going to say next. In fact, when listening to the recording, we observe a brief pause of nearly two seconds right after the marker. Other examples show how the speakers are using the same discourse marker in order to end up the conversation. As a consequence, *High Score 4* includes in its listening comprehension exercises some examples of *well* that seem to reflect its use in real conversations. As a matter of fact, in opposition to Carter and Fung's (2007)

conclusions on their research in Hong Kong, this textbook actually gives examples of the pragmatic usages *well* as a discourse marker, while Fung and Carter (2007) claimed that this was rarely focused upon. *High Score 4* uses *well* as a discourse marker on a regular basis all throughout the units and is the third most frequent discourse marker from units 1 to 18.

6. DISCUSSION

Upon closer examination of the scales the CEFR establishes for spoken interaction at the A2 level (informal discussion with friends, goal-oriented co-operation, taking the floor and coherence), it can be deduced that listening comprehension exercises seem appropriate to enhance the use of discourse markers and thus promote one of the features required for acquiring spoken interactional competence. For instance, in chapter 4, the CEFR states: "A2 learners can indicate when he/she is following" (p. 79). In fact, using the classification of Fung and Carter (2007), it can be seen that the spoken features that mark a listener or speaker who is showing responses and denoting thinking process are *yes*, *yeah* and *well* which are on the list of the most frequent discourse markers used in *High Score 4*.

Furthermore, it is interesting to highlight the fact that, even if in small quantities, it is very positive that these listening comprehension exercises include other examples of markers required in the CEFR for other levels. For instance, in the extract of one of the conversations in *High Score 4*, speakers use other markers such as *listen*, *really*, *right*, *in fact* and *okay*; *oh*, *you mean*, *I mean* and *okay, should I say, I suppose not, I guess, that's it, still*; all of them are suitable for spoken informal contexts rather than written interaction. On this matter, Parrot (2000) declares that it is crucial to explain to learners the context in which they should use each discourse marker.

All in all, the results of the analysis indicate that *High Score 4* include examples of Referential, Interpersonal, Structural and Cognitive types (Fung and Carter 2007) of discourse markers in *High Score 4.* This is also very significant since on the interpersonal level specifically, discourse markers are useful to facilitate and to mark shared knowledge, attitudes, and responses. At the A2 level, this is exactly what the CEFR states in its curriculum: "can make and respond to suggestions" "can answer questions and respond to simple statements" (CEFR, 2001). The referential level shows the highest frequency in the use of discourse markers, indicating textual relationships including cause, contrast, coordination, disjunction, consequence, digression, comparison, etc. And again, at the A2 level, this is exactly what the CEFR states in its curriculum (of course in a very simple way): "can link groups of words with simple connectors". Finally, on the structural level, discourse markers are used to orientate and organize the discourse. Although there is a high quantity of discourse markers in this category, it should be remarked that the structural level requires a higher level of students than A2. On the cognitive level, the situation remains the same: discourse markers help in denoting the speaker's thinking process, marking repairs such as reformulation, self-correction, elaboration, and hesitation in conversation, as well as

marking speaker assessment of listener knowledge of utterances. That is why the first and the second categories are the most appropriate for the A2 level, and obviously the most frequent in *High Score 4*. The case of *yes* and *yeah*, however, seems to indicate that further research on the list of markers to be included in textbooks for each level, still needs to be pursued.

The results of the study are positive since *High Score 4* introduces a (limited) variety of markers, which may help students fulfill CEFR requirements for the A2 level. The book also includes examples of other markers which are more challenging (e.g., in fact) for an A2 level, but such is real conversation. It is almost impossible to resort to real conversations in which speakers maintain an A2 level, and textbooks should somehow reflect this fact. In general, the wide range of discourse markers used in the book and the frequency of particular markers reflect the natural linguistic input English as a Second or Foreign Language learners are exposed to. Accordingly, the incorporation of discourse markers into the language curriculum is necessary to enhance fluent and naturalistic conversational skills, to help avoid misunderstanding in communication, and, essentially, to provide learners with a sense of security in L2.

REFERENCES

BUCK, G. (2001). *Assessing listening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CARTER, R. (2002). The Grammar of Talk: Spoken English, Grammar and the Classroom. University of Nottingham.

CARTER, R.., McCarthy, M. (1997). *Exploring spoken English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CARTER, R., Hughes, R., McCarthy, M. (2000).*Exploring grammar in context upper-intermediate and advanced*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CHAPETÓN, C.M. (2009). *The use and functions of discourse markers in EFL Classroom interaction*. Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. Bogotá.

CONSELLERÍA DE EDUCACIÓN. Decreto 112/2007, de 20 de Julio. Currículo de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria en la Comunitat Valenciana. [2007/9717]

COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2012). European Language Portfolio. Learning the language of the host country. Language Policy Unit.DG II- Education Department.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2006). Europeans and their languages. Special Eurobarometer 243 / Wave 64.3 –*TNS Opinion & Social*

FIRTH, A. (1996). The discursive accomplishment of normality: On 'lingua franca' English and conversation analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26, 237-259.

FUNG, L. and R. CARTER. (2007). Discourse markers and spoken English: native and learner use in pedagogic settings. *Applied Linguistics*.

GREGORI-SIGNES, C. (1996). Bueno, hasta luego: el uso de bueno en conversaciones. *Miscelánea*, 17. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza.

GREGORI-SIGNES, C. BOU, P (1999). Pragmática intercultural: emisiones del oyente en inglés británico y español peninsular. Universitat de València. *Quaderns de Filologia: Estudis Lingüístics IV*: 123-134. (Monographic issue: Pragmàtica Intercultural).

HYMES, D. (1967). Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life. *Sociolinguistics: The Essential Readings*. Oxford: Blackwell.

LINDGREN, J. (2008). *Interaction competence: a concept describing the competence needed in face-to-face interaction*. (Bachelor's Thesis) Uppsala University.

MCCARTHY, M. (2003). Talking back: 'small'interactional response tokens in everyday conversation. *Research on Language in Social Interaction*, 36, 33-63.

MCCARTHY, M. (2005). Fluency and confluence: What fluent speakers do.*The Language Teacher* 29(6): 26-28.

McCarthy, M., Carter, R. (2001). Ten criteria for a spoken grammar.*New Perspectives on Grammar Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*.

PARROTT, M. (2000). *Grammar for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge University Press.

PEARSON LONGMAN C.E.F. *Teacher's Guide to the Common European Framework*.

SCHIFFRIN, D. (1987). *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

WALSH, S. (2012). Conceptualising classroom interactional competence.*Novitas Royal. Research on Youth and Language.*6(1), 1-14.

YOUNG, R. (2000) *Interactional competence: challenges for validity*. United States: University of Wisconsin-Madison.

YOUNG, R. (2008). *Language and interaction: An advanced resource book*. London & New York: Routledge.

IDIOMS HAVE GRAMMAR: TEACHING IDIOMS ACCORDING TO THEIR GRAMMATICAL FORM AND VOCABULARY DOMAINS

LOS MODISMOS TIENEN GRAMÁTICA: LA ENSEÑANZA DE LOS MODISMOS DE ACUERDO A SU FORMA GRAMATICAL Y DOMINIOS DE VOCABULARIO

Regina GUTIÉRREZ PÉREZ

Universidad Pablo de Olavide

ABSTRACT:

One of the most effective ways for students to incorporate new words and expressions into their language is through the study of idiomatic expressions. Indeed, the Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms (1993: x) states in its introduction that "the accurate and appropriate use of English expressions which are in the broadest sense idiomatic in one distinguishing mark of a native command of the language and a reliable measure of the proficiency of foreign learners". We therefore advocate explicit classroom attention to idioms, on the grounds that it is an integral part of language. Idiomatic language should be at the heart of every learning material aimed at communicative proficiency. How should we teach them? How do we point out the various kinds of idioms to our students? Are idioms best taught by examining their grammatical form or through vocabulary domains and related meaning? Teaching idioms requires a multi-faceted approach. Sometimes, a teacher needs to explain their grammar, such as their grammatical category: adjective phrases, noun phrases, verb phrases, etc. On other occasions, a list of idioms belonging to the same general category of meaning or metaphor is called for, given that that the meanings of many idioms are not arbitrary but partially compositional motivated by three mechanisms: metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge (Kövecses, 2002: 201). Students generally like to learn groups of them in this way, and we have found that they are always amused to learn such as those dealing with, for example, parts of the body (*by heart, cold shoulder, neck of the woods*, and so on) all together in such a group. Foreign language learners encounter difficulties using idiomatic expressions in everyday language. In this study, efforts have been made to provide an effective way for teaching them applying both approaches and following the tenets of Cognitive Linguistics. We argue that teaching idioms in this way can accelerate their learning and their long-term retention.
KEY WORDS: Idioms, Grammatical Categories, Conceptual Metaphor, Cognitive Linguistics

RESUMEN:

Una de las formas más eficaces para que los estudiantes incorporen nuevas palabras y expresiones a su lengua es a través del estudio de expresiones idiomáticas. De hecho, el Diccionario Oxford de modismos ingleses (1993: x) indica en su introducción que "the accurate and appropriate use of English expressions which are in the broadest sense idiomatic in one distinguishing mark of a native command of the language and a reliable measure of the proficiency of foreign learners". Por tanto, abogamos por una atención explícita en la clase a los